

Sharing Problems and Solutions

**Link Study Exchange Visits in the
Jamaica All Age Schools Project**

Ray Mace

Sharing Problems and Solutions

This publication examines the use of Link Study Exchange Visits as part of the Jamaica All Age Schools Project (JAASP) which ran for 3 years between 2000 and 2003. The direct beneficiaries of the project are the children and communities in the most disadvantaged, remote rural areas of Jamaica. JAASP specifically aimed to tackle the key issues of Access, Quality, Retention and Equity in relation to rural education. One of the underlying principles behind the project has been the building of partnerships between schools, parents, communities, Ministry of Education officers and the private sector to develop improved lifetime opportunities for rural children. This paper evaluates the impact of wider partnerships - between key educators in Jamaica and in UK - in the development of innovative and appropriate practice in education in both countries.

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Link Study Exchange Visits in the Jamaica All Age Schools Project**

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INTRODUCTION

The Jamaica All Age Schools Project

Funded by the UK Government Department for International Development as part of its programme to eliminate poverty, and in collaboration with the Government of Jamaica, JAASP worked with 48 remote rural All-Age schools from April 2000 to May 2003. These schools, located in clusters in each of the six education regions of the island, were afforded the lowest status by the community at large, being characterised by

- low rates of student achievement
- high rates of absenteeism
- low levels of community and financial support
- inadequate buildings
- minimum resources for learning

As a consequence, they produced students who were least qualified for work or upper secondary education. Against this background, JAASP specifically aimed to tackle the key issues identified by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture: Access, Quality, Retention and Equity.

The overall purpose of the project was to provide better education for children in poor rural communities and, through this, to contribute to improved lifetime opportunities for them. The direct beneficiaries of the project were the children and communities in the most disadvantaged, remote rural areas of Jamaica. There were wider benefits for all through the development of sustainable systems at central and regional levels.

The key underpinning principles of the project can be summarised as follows:

- respecting, and building on, the existing work of Jamaican educators
- involving all stakeholders through a participatory approach
- developing ownership of the project through autonomy and accountability of stakeholders
- engaging parents and the community in the life of the school and their children's education
- including community development as a key component for sustainability
- recognising diversity within the classroom
- developing a learning culture: a focus on learning for all and on everyone sharing what they have learned

There were several main components to the project, which interfaced with each other to provide a holistic approach to tackling the multiple problems identified in the baseline survey. These were:

1. Community/ School Participation
2. School Management
3. Quality of Teaching and Learning
4. Strengthening Regional and National Systems
5. Teaching and Learning Resources
6. Minor Rehabilitation Works
7. Lesson Learning

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Study visits and their contribution to strengthening regional and national systems

Under component 4 study visits and exchange links were initiated in six key areas:

- Community Relations Education
- Guidance and Counselling
- Literacy
- Maths/ Numeracy and Computing
- Regional Management
- Special Needs

This paper provides a review of the operation and outcomes of UK study visits, as well as the return visits to Jamaica of United Kingdom counterparts who were identified by the visiting groups from Jamaica, and assesses their value in the development of common educational issues facing both countries. It seeks to draw attention to the range of activities undertaken; the processes involved in designing and delivering the programmes of study; the perceived outcomes and learning points as a result of the shared experience. This report has been possible due to the willingness of participants both in Jamaica and the UK to find the time to express their views on the value of the activity and their perceptions of the experience undertaken.

Patricia Daniel
Series Editor

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THE LINK VISITS

During the period from June 2001 and October 2002 a total of 39 staff nominated by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture, Jamaica, visited the United Kingdom for a two week study visit in areas identified by the Ministry as being of importance to the achievement of education targets set under the Project. The study visits in the UK were organized and led by the author on behalf of the Centre for International Development and Training (CIDT) at that time located in Walsall.

The groups visiting the United Kingdom, (in date order) were as follows:

Literacy	4 persons	17 June – 2 July 2001
Regional Management	7 persons	28 November - 1 December 2001
Community Relations Education	7 persons	10 -23 March 2002
Special Educational Needs	6 persons	9 – 22 June 2002
Guidance and Counselling	8 persons	22 September – 4 October 2002
Maths/Numeracy/Computing	7 persons	6-19 October 2002

Table 1

Between the 19th May and 31st May 23 participants were interviewed in Jamaica with a view to assessing the impact of the UK visits. Interviews were conducted mostly on a one-to-one basis and interviewees were assured that their comments would remain confidential except where they had given approval for their name to be used.

Under the study visits programme, JAASP facilitated visits to Jamaica of ten people who had been identified by the groups visiting the UK as being ‘useful’ to the development process in Jamaica and who would also benefit from the experience in Jamaica in relation to their work back in the UK.

All the groups visiting the UK had the opportunity to invite an appropriate peer(s) group member back to Jamaica. Of the six groups visiting the UK, the Literacy group identified two people. The Maths/ Numeracy/ Computing group identified one person. The Regional Management group invited three people and the Special Needs group invited four.

In-country programmes for the visitors to Jamaica were designed with the Ministry and the Project Office in conjunction with the visiting UK group. Programmes were designed to include opportunities for sharing good practice, presentation workshops on themes of common interest and visits to schools and local communities.

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The visits to Jamaica focused upon areas of shared concern and interest that had been identified during the group visits to the UK. In most cases visitors to Jamaica formed their perceptions on the value of the return visit during their time in Jamaica. Already some outcomes from the visits to Jamaica have already moved forward to become sustainable activities.

In one area, Maths/ Numeracy/ Computing, a key outcome has been the formation of a draft national policy statement. This group came to the UK with this clear goal in mind and their return visitor was chosen on the basis that his contribution to the discussion would help shape the contents of the new national policy statement. This link therefore focused on a nation-wide activity. In other discipline areas identified for study visits, development activities in Jamaica have focused on regional, cluster and individual improvement plans.

THE PROCESS

Interviews conducted with 23 participants suggested that the study link process could have been made more effective in the pre-visit and post-visit follow-up period. Views were also captured on the operation and perceived value of the study visit itself.

Pre-Visit Views

- More time would have been appreciated from being notified of a place on the UK programme to its time of operation. Most people recorded a notification time of 'about three weeks'. One participant claimed to have had less than five days notice of their expected departure to the UK.
- All participants interviewed recorded that they had received sufficient information on the UK visit prior to their departure, though would have welcomed advice on the type of clothing and shoes to wear in the light of a major difference in climate conditions between the two countries.
- All participants stated that they did have the opportunity to influence the content of the UK programme through the pre-visit meeting operated by the Project Office. However, it was accepted that because, in general, groups did not have a pre-planned focus for their visit it was difficult to suggest what they would like to see/hear about in advance of the visit.
- On occasions the UK proposed operational dates of visits did not coincide with the preferred operational dates of the Ministry and some groups found that previously informed dates did not materialize.
- Variations in the way people were chosen for the programmes were evident. Some people were informed by telephone or letter. Some were required to

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attend an interview where a selection process was in place. One, a Counselling and Guidance group member, was nominated by her national association.

- Over 80% of the participants interviewed recorded their personal/professional desire to undertake the visit as being focused on the need to assess the effectiveness of another system. Other reasons included to share understanding of common problems and to be able to consider the various ways in which people seek to tackle such common problems and issues. For 70% of those interviewed this was to be their first visit to the UK.

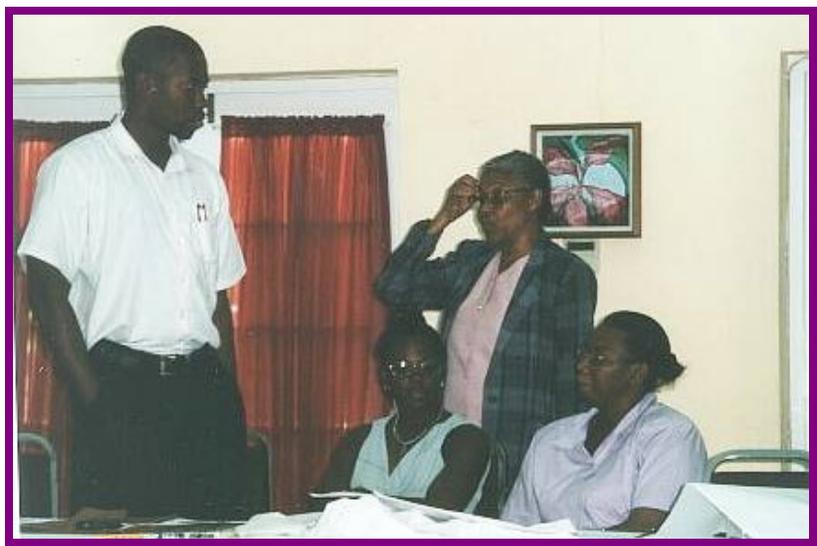
The Study Visit

- All participants recorded that the programmes of study were 'very full'. One participant stated 'It was a four week programme undertaken in two weeks.' However, all participants considered that the fast pace was necessary to cover the areas of interest.
- All participants recorded high levels of satisfaction with their programme. On a scale of 1– 10, 10 being high, the programmes scored an average of 9, with only one group scoring the visit as 7.
- All participants recorded that all sections of the programme undertaken were of value to them. No participants expressed a view that there were times when the time could have been more effectively used for other things.
- The work shadowing placement period (5 days) was considered 'about right' for those involved in the regional management course.
- Views on the impact of the programme varied from '*major*' to '*substantial*' with people talking about the value of '*cross-fertilization*' of ideas, exposure to other systems and structures, opportunities to discuss shared problems, a chance to see '*other ways of working*' and '*a realization that in Jamaica we do some things well here.*'
- The unique opportunity to acquire material and ideas for new resources was cited by 80% of those interviewed.
- Longer periods of time in schools would have been appreciated, though it was accepted that due to the fast pace of the programme, it would have been difficult to extend this opportunity further without cutting other parts of the schedule.

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Post-Visit Views

- The visit enabled a focus to be identified for potential development purposes back in Jamaica.
- Once the focus had been identified it would have been valuable to have been able to return to the UK for a specialist visit with a view to developing an implementation strategy.
- All groups were required to write a written report on their UK experience and in most cases to make a presentation to senior colleagues on the issues raised by the visit. Some groups organized workshops for colleagues on issues of topical interest.
- The value of such reporting approaches is unclear. One interviewee suggested that the structures for feedback were there, but not as beneficial as they could be: *“What is in place can be said to be superficial.”*
- The Regional Management group would have welcomed time for placement with a second LEA to allow comparative approaches to be examined.
- One interviewee cited the value of the UK experience in relation to later JAASP training in regional management planning.
- **All participants considered that educational developments/activities that have taken place in Jamaica since the UK visit would not have happened so effectively without the UK experience.**



PERCEPTIONS OF THE UK VISIT

This section seeks to examine the key perceptions of participants to the UK programme under each individual subject area. The views expressed will represent a proportion of the participants as not all were interviewed. As a minimum, 50% of one group was interviewed (Literacy), rising to 90% for the Regional Management group. Perceptions of group members are recorded under subject in chronological order of visits.

Literacy

The visit to the UK enabled the group to see the Literacy Hour in operation in UK schools and this facilitated the introduction of a Literacy Window¹ in JAASP schools. In general, the visit enabled a close examination of strategies being employed in the UK to enhance Literacy achievement. One interviewee stated:

“It was our golden opportunity to see what people do. This would be impossible otherwise. It also enabled us to compare and see what interesting parallels there are with our own system.”

Daphine Simon, Core Curriculum Unit

Another interviewee reported:

“I have never been to the UK before and never seen the inside of a UK classroom. This was my chance to experience the learning environment.”

Maureen Byfield, Moneague Teachers College

Interviewees also focused discussion on the value gained from seeing teacher training approaches to Literacy as well as the use of the ‘writing frame.’² The visit to Wales to see English taught as a second language was cited as being of particular interest due to similarities of problems associated with second language learning in Jamaica.

All participants recorded their appreciation of being exposed to a range of Literacy material. The visits to Literacy resource centres were considered to be very worthwhile given that such centres were due to be developed in Jamaica.

Another important learning experience cited by interviewees was that of being exposed to a range of teaching and learning strategies. Through disseminating what had been seen and learnt, they believed this was beneficial in influencing classroom practice back

¹ The Literacy Window provides time for students to experience a range of new stimuli for encouraging literacy development

² The Writing Frame provides a structure for writing and using new words from a Word Bank

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in Jamaica. In addition, it would also enable students in training to gain insight into classroom practices in the UK.

One interviewee stated:

“We saw the curriculum in action. We accessed a lot of material and I am now in a position to decide what to implement in a way suitable to Jamaica.”

When asked how implementation strategies would be adopted in Jamaica, the reply was:

“In Jamaica you have to wait until the time for an idea has come. There are lags between when you learn something and when you get a free hand to try it.”

This statement suggests that, although written reports and presentations on overseas visits are part of the formal feed-back system, there does not seem to be an effective Ministry-wide mechanism for turning new ideas into practice across the education system.

Regional Management

Participants interviewed for this programme gave a range of answers as to why they had been chosen to come to the UK. The most common answers focused around perceptions that they were heavily involved in JAASP or working on issues related to the JAASP targets. However, one participant chose to state that they just happened to be in the right place at the right time! All expressed a personal wish to become familiar with the UK education system and to experience the ways in which local education authorities function in the UK.

The most noticeable reaction to the question on ‘impact of the visit’ centred on local planning and target setting. All participants found the work-shadowing period very informative and claimed to have gained much from attending school improvement planning meetings, headteacher meetings, school visits and training days related to school inspection, failing schools and target setting. The placement period was, as one Regional Director stated:

“A tremendous help. The visit way surpassed my expectations. I gained more out of the UK visit than any other educational visit I have ever attended.”

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Another group member stated:

“The interaction with various persons was invaluable. I was fascinated by your school governor meetings, the way schools in critical circumstances were supported, and how target setting was undertaken and monitored to get improvements. The whole experience helped with our regional development plan.”

The value to regional planning was also highlighted by other participants who sighted the insight into LEA planning as ‘most helpful’ to the development of plans in Jamaica while 50% of those interviewed stated that the exposure to the UK system had helped them ‘reflect on how things happen in Jamaica’ and how they could tailor some of the ideas and approaches to the needs of Jamaica.

One group member reported that they did not like being separate from other group members for the placement period (five days), while three others asked for the opportunity to be placed in another authority to assess where similarities and differences exist. All participants found the experience ‘most valuable’ and would welcome a repeat opportunity to build on their learning from the first placement. All perceived that a second placement period would be even more valuable as it would enable them to focus on topics that they wish to develop further back in Jamaica.

Two group members expressed a wish that the study visit had attracted senior Ministry staff as well. Their view was that change and implementation would have been more likely had those who take the key decisions experienced the same. This suggests that the study visits did not include the ‘movers and shakers’ required to ‘make a difference’. However, there is evidence to suggest that at regional and local level participants have been active in ‘trying out’ approaches and encouraging discussion through workshops on the topics they experienced while in the UK.

Community Relations Education

The Community Relations officers who were interviewed for this report all stated that they were chosen because of their keen interest in the work of JAASP and for their commitment in the development of community relations in the country. They all wanted to see ‘another system’ while at the same time they wished to share their own community experiences with others.

All participants stated that the UK visit far exceeded their expectations. While all programme content was considered valuable, two visits were specifically mentioned by all visitors – the visit to the community fire station in Handsworth and the Learning Day event held in central Birmingham. Another key experience mentioned by 80% of those interviewed was the role of the Education Action Zones and their links to local industry and commerce. This public/ private relationship was applauded by those who attended

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and all were now developing strategies for the inclusion of local employers in their community development activities.

The variety of topics covered in the study visit seemed to have encouraged a range of interest in the visiting members. As well as those topics highlighted above as being of particular value, others recorded interest in the school inspection process, the neighbourhood watch scheme, schools under-achieving, approaches to adult education, and community initiatives. Cross-curricular interests also included approaches to ICT, parental involvement in Numeracy and Literacy schemes, the design and implementation of school improvement plans and early years learning.

As one participant said:

“Everything we did was a learning experience. It made me hungry for more learning. My exposure to developments in the UK has helped me to prioritize my actions for the future.”

Everald Douglas, Community Relations Education Officer

The group members confirmed that they had met on returning to Jamaica to formulate a joint report and also made a joint presentation to management and colleagues on their experiences in the UK. Group members claimed that one initiative seen in the UK – the parenting workshop – was now operated as a national initiative, while local communities were also piloting a version of the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme. Thus through individual enthusiasm and experience a range of local initiatives would seem to be now taking place.

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Those interviewed from the SEN group stated that they believed they had been chosen to go to the UK as they would be able to effectively share what they had gained from the visit with their colleagues, so ensuring succession training in a relatively new area for the Ministry.

All aspects of the UK programme were considered worthwhile, but one participant expressed concern at the amount of new technology in use in the UK – a situation, because of budget constraints, that would not be possible in Jamaica. Nevertheless, the cross-section of developments observed provided the opportunity for new approaches to be observed, with many requiring limited resources.

The group highlighted the visit to Springfield Special School as of greatest value. It gave new and useful insights into the process of managing student behaviour, especially related to autism. Various teaching and learning strategies were observed and the

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'picture code'³ communication system in operation at the school was of particular interest.

One participant stated:

"We are in the process of expanding the SEN Unit and need to know the types of services we should be offering and how best to utilise our resources. The UK visit helped us with our development planning and introduced us to some effective teaching approaches."

Salome Evering, Special Education Unit

The other area highlighted as beneficial was learning about work with the visually impaired, especially the visit to the resource centre funded by the Institute for the Blind.

The only criticism was related to the duration of the visit. All participants considered the visit to be too compressed and would have welcomed a longer stay to allow for particular specialist interests to be followed up.

As one participant said:

"We could not have done the things we have done since our return to Jamaica without the visit to the UK."

Details of the activities and outcomes attributed to the time spent in the UK can be found in the next section.

Guidance and Counselling

Owing to the structure of the Guidance and Counselling system in Jamaica, specific involvement of this area of education support was not initially included in the JAASP link study programme. However, as the Project developed it became increasingly obvious that Guidance Counsellors working in clusters of schools did have an important role to play in the school-community link activities. Thus group participants chosen by the Ministry to attend the UK study programme ranged from those based in the central Ministry to those based in colleges and those with responsibilities for guidance and counselling across a number of schools. All recorded that they had been chosen for the programme because of their ability to disseminate ideas and so help formulate policy and plans for the future.

³ The Picture Code Communication System uses symbols, objects or designs to help pupils understand concepts

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One participant recorded:

“It was decided to go beyond JAASP to counsellors as it was recognised that we need to expand the ways we can help students.”

Antoinette Brooks, Guidance Counsellor

The members interviewed from this group complained that they had received no less than three potential departure dates to the UK before the final date was agreed. The uncertainty caused by this resulted in personal stress as each tried to fit professional and personal life around a potential absence period. Nevertheless all participants interviewed found the UK experience ‘very worthwhile’ as *‘our own studies are somewhat outdated and we have usually been only able to compare our operation to the US system.’*

In spite of the confusion over departure dates, all participants recorded satisfaction with their programme of study in the UK and recorded high satisfaction at the opportunities they had to influence the content of the UK programme. However, on a score of 1 to 10 (10 being high), the group rated the visit as a 7 on the grounds that they would have preferred, on reflection, to have seen in action the way second generation Jamaicans were handled in the UK system. Additionally, they would have welcomed more time to talk with those dealing with second generation youngsters and would have welcomed some built-in periodic ‘down-time’ to reflect on what they had seen and heard during their visits. Time to visit libraries would also have been welcomed.

The group accepted that their programme was particularly demanding in terms of travel due to visiting national centres both to the north and far southern parts of the country. In view of this, perhaps not surprisingly, all considered that a two week placement was too short given the distances travelled and the range of topics covered. As one member stated:

“There was much to learn in such a short time.”

All members recorded a wish to have had time to be attached to an organisation for a work-shadowing experience. It was considered that a second visit to the UK would have enabled this to happen and would have facilitated the development of improvement plans for the service in Jamaica.

High praise was received for the amount of resource materials the group were exposed to and able to collect. This provided the opportunity for materials to be assessed, ideas to be formulated and initial plans for development to be discussed amongst the group. On returning to Jamaica the group produced a report for senior management, but one person recorded their sorrow that no formal response was received from the Ministry on their report. In addition, presentations had been made on the visit to Ministry staff and to other counsellors.

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All visits received high praise for their interest and relevance. The similarity of problems between the UK and Jamaica was sighted as a surprising learning point and thus sharing these problems with UK peers was particularly helpful.

The entire group recorded that they were particularly interested in the work of Connexions⁴ and at the end of their visit had highlighted this area as one worthy of potential development in Jamaica. However, it was decided not to pursue this UK link any further on the grounds that currently a similar system in Jamaica did not exist and thus such changes would have required managerial, financial and policy changes which the group considered to be outside their scope for development.

The group made particular reference to the UK focus of 'Youth at Risk'⁵ policies and expressed a wish to pursue this 'youth concept' further.

"We share affinity with the concept that youth has different needs and that through a network of services someone is attending each need. We need too wrap our minds around understanding youth and realise that the child is at the centre."

With this view in mind the group has since held workshops on the pastoral care system in the UK with principals of JAASP schools and has put together a pastoral care document for school use for the coming academic year. One participant, commenting on her exposure to the UK pastoral system stated:

"A light bulb snapped on with the pastoral care system. I expect that eventually it would have happened without us going to the UK, but by going to the UK we have been able to contextualise the system and adapt it for our own use."

Dr. Delores Brissett, Head of Guidance Counselling Unit

As a direct result of the UK visit Guidance Counsellors have held workshops on pastoral care, produced a support booklet for JAASP schools and held discussion groups with fellow counsellors on caring for the 'whole child' while also encouraging the use of school mentors from the community. This, said one counsellor, has been possible because:

"We have had the opportunity to see and hear about another system while at the same time we have been able to establish crisis intervention units in each region and so develop systems and structures suitable for the Jamaican context."

⁴ Connexions is the UK national career guidance and support system

⁵ Youth At Risk is a networking approach involving a range of youth-focused organisations that seek to link together to meet the needs of the child

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Maths/ Numeracy/ Computing

All group members recorded their belief that they had been chosen for the UK visit because of their planned involvement in the creation of a national Maths policy. Group members spoke of how they had met on a number of occasions before departing for the UK and as a consequence had been able to influence the content of their UK study visit. One member stated:

“The programme was very hard work, but because we had a focus it helped. Probably there was too much to see and do in just two weeks, so an extra week to reflect and digest would have been valuable.”

Rosalyn Kelly, Maths/ Numeracy Group

All participants interviewed considered that the visit had far exceeded their expectations. In particular members cited the most beneficial as being: the range of Maths/ Numeracy/ Computing activities seen (from Early Years to post-16); the use of technology as a learning tool; the role of Maths co-ordinators; and the methods employed to ensure that students understood maths concepts.

Others spoke highly of the opportunity of seeing a range of maths resources and found particularly valuable the opportunity to discuss teaching and learning approaches with maths teachers. Other areas of interest highlighted included INSET approaches, the use and value of national support materials and the assessment and recording processes.

Group members also recorded appreciation of being able to see and discuss the way in which problem schools were helped and improved. Strategies for school improvement were noted and ideas incorporated into discussions back in Jamaica.

Since returning to Jamaica the group had continued to meet on a regular basis. A report was produced and presentations had taken place to other staff on the UK experience. A draft policy document had been written and was being trialled in a number of schools. Workshops had been held to develop skills in the classroom to enable ‘maths understanding’ to be more effective in the learning process. Such workshops had included an in-depth analysis of schemes of work and lesson plans with a view to assisting the teacher to become more conscious of the learning process when dealing with concept issues associated with maths.

Since returning to Jamaica the group had invited one UK person to assist in the development of the national policy and also provided that person with the opportunity to observe classroom practices in Jamaica and to attend workshops to discuss with teachers ways in which maths learning could become more effective. This two-way sharing has enabled a link to be established between the UK visiting group and the Midlands Regional Numeracy Director through which both are sharing ideas, experiences and perceptions of the two national systems.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE RETURN VISITS TO JAMAICA

Under the link programme arrangement ten staff from the UK were invited to visit Jamaica in order to pursue areas of joint interest. The decision as to which personnel should visit Jamaica was in the hands of the visiting group, who in turn, liaised with senior staff at the Ministry on the value of such a visit for the specialism concerned. The number of staff invited to Jamaica by each group was dependent on the activities they wanted them to be involved in.

For example, the Special Needs group perceived the need to explore a range of different special needs areas ranging from autism to the partially-sighted. They also wished to involve parents, community members and teachers in the discussion process and provide a number of opportunities for people to be able to access a series of workshops across the island. Consequently four UK staff offering a range of related skills was invited. At the other end of the spectrum the Numeracy group only invited one person whose specialist knowledge was in the development of national resources and support material as well as in the writing of key Numeracy documents.

The Literacy group invited two colleagues out to Jamaica and one of these visited three times to assist with the development of the Literacy window and in the development of teaching and learning strategies for Project schools. The Regional Management group invited three people. These visits focused on discussions and workshops associated with school improvement, the role of the inspection service, target setting, regional planning and life-long learning. Though the visitors to this group overlapped in their activities they all visited at different times during the project and focused their involvement on the region where their UK placement counterpart came from. This provided the opportunity to create region-to-region links and to focus discussion on matters of joint interest.

The remaining visitors to the UK decided not to invite a person(s) to Jamaica as they were uncertain both during and after the UK visit of the value a return visitor would have to their development plans. As recorded earlier, these groups felt that as they departed for the UK without a clear goal in mind, a second visit to the UK would have been necessary to enable time for a focus to be agreed and an area of study to be developed. However as the chart below (Table 2) indicates, all groups who visited the UK were able to initiate action in various forms on returning to Jamaica. It may have been however that, had goals been determined by all groups prior to departure, even greater developments may have by now been forthcoming.

All visitors to Jamaica felt that they had been invited because they had developed strong professional links during the UK study visit. As one participant stated:

“They visited our school, liked what they saw, and showed empathy with our work and wanted to develop a close working relationship. Since that first meeting we have both benefited from the link.”

Irene Corden, Headteacher, Springfield School, Staffordshire

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Four other visitors to Jamaica perceived that their link had been developed because they were *'talking the same language and experiencing similar problems'*, while the remainder spoke of the practical nature of their work and how such work was of interest to the visitors who wanted to know more. In the case of the regional management group, the link partners chosen were the people they were paired with during their five day placement period in the UK. Other groups identified personnel for link purposes from a range of visits made during their stay in the UK. Only one person identified as a potential link person declined the offer of a visit to Jamaica, because of time commitments.

Those who had organised the visits to Jamaica recorded their satisfaction with the outcomes from the visit of their counterpart. There was disappointment that three visitors could only stay one week, but the counterparts were satisfied that they had made good use of their visitor's time while they were in Jamaica. Two hosts recorded their delight at the interest that had been shown by their colleagues on the topics to be discussed with their UK counterpart and all hosts recorded high attendance of colleagues at discussion groups and workshops organised during the stay of their visitor. It was perceived that such activities encouraged wider discussion of the issues and in turn raised motivation levels of staff as they discussed different ways to approach the topics under review. **This, stated the interviewees, encouraged people outside of JAASP to consider the issues more deeply and try new ways of working in the interests of effectiveness and efficiency.**

Arrangements prior to visit

All those who undertook visits to Jamaica considered that they had received a high volume of detail before their departure. All had received an outline programme and all considered that they had been able to influence the content of that programme. While some changes to the programmes did take place during its operation all participants considered that the changes were minor and due to reasons outside the control of the hosts, (such as bad weather hampering travel). Through the use of technology all visitors to Jamaica had been in direct email contact with their lead counterpart prior to departure and all visitors spoke highly of the informative and friendly way both the Kingston and Walsall offices facilitated their visit. Due to the enthusiasm of the audiences, some discussion periods over-ran their allotted time, but all visitors recorded that their programmes had been followed - even if they were somewhat over-crowded and perhaps too optimistic as regards what could be achieved in the time.

The Visit

All three visitors associated with Regional Management expressed delight at the experience gained during the visit. While they had all three been expecting to contribute to discussions in key areas such as accountability, target setting, MIS, data analysis and

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curriculum development, they had personally not expected to gain so much from the visit themselves. One spoke of finding that discipline in schools had not been a key issue as expected. Another spoke of the realisation that generic issues such as discipline could not be compartmentalised as previously expected, or that teaching and learning approaches could be easily transferable across different cultures. All visitors expressed thanks for being given the opportunity to visit as it had not only provided an insight into another country's education system and structure, but it had opened eyes on a range of issues that had been previously perceived as being issues confined to their region or country of origin.

“What the visit did was to help me question what we do here. It enabled me to become familiar with another country's education system and to become aware for the first time of the cultural differences...”

Graham Smart, Numeracy Regional Director, DfES

All those interviewed on the visit were asked what impact they considered their visit made and all felt that the commitment and interest shown during the UK visit was further demonstrated while in Jamaica. Visitors to the island cited instances of requests for longer discussion sessions, for additional workshops to pursue areas of shared interest and instances of colleagues being telephoned to 'come in' to share in the discussions. All visitors considered the experience invaluable and as one stated:

“Very challenging to my own pre-conceived views.”

Javed Khan, DCEO Birmingham LEA

One Literacy visitor stated:

“The visit was a major growth area for me. My line manager claims the visit has affected what I do. It was an amazing self-development opportunity.”

Anne Derry, Literacy Co-ordinator, Walsall LEA

All visitors felt they had given of their best to their Jamaican counterparts and all felt they had gained much from the experience through observation of classroom practices, discussion on a range of topics of mutual interest and social interaction with professional colleagues. Topics pursued during the visits other than for the regional management group included teaching and learning strategies, English as a second language, approaches to life-long learning, education-business interchange and curriculum development.

Two visiting colleagues expressed a wish to have had time to undertake greater research prior to the visit than they had done. With hindsight this was considered wise due to the range of new learning that they had to undergo during the two week stay.

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Three of the ten visitors visited Jamaica for only one week. All the other visitors stayed for a full two weeks. The one-week visits were not, on reflection, considered long enough both to absorb new information and to make any significant contribution to educational developments in Jamaica. Their counterparts in Jamaica still felt that a one-week visit was better than nothing, but all expressed regret that longer stays were not possible.

At the time of the research all visitors were in email contact with their UK counterpart on a perceived regular basis, although it was considered too early in the relationship to suggest that such links will be long-lasting.

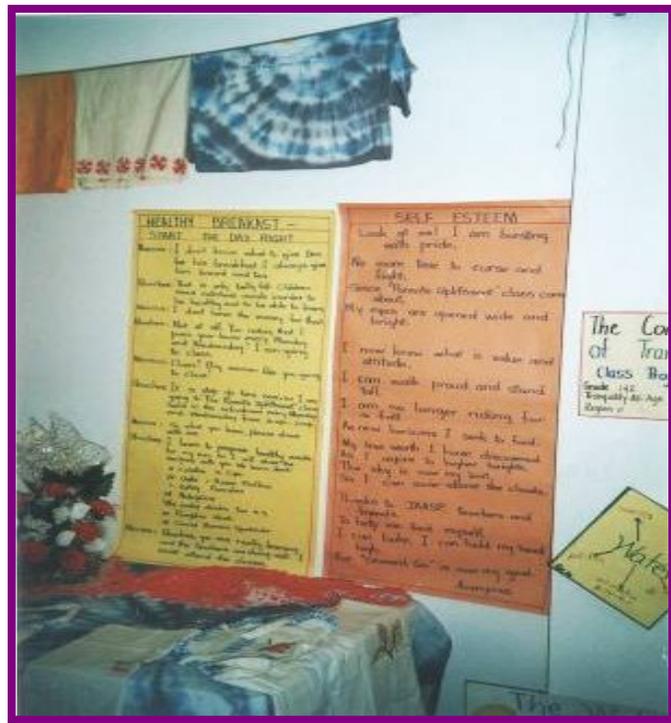
However, In the case of Birmingham LEA, a number of additional links have already been made with both teachers and pupils visiting Jamaica and plans for the development of regional resource centres supported by the Birmingham Education Authority. Plans are also being developed to link at least one teacher training institution in Jamaica with a similar counterpart in the Birmingham area. In addition Birmingham is making bids to the European Union and the Department for International Development and Training (DFID) for financial support to further develop the links established under JAASP. Birmingham has since announced that it intends to seek to forge similar links in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan as a direct result of its successful link with Jamaica.

General Impressions

- All visitors to Jamaica considered that they had been of help to their Jamaican counterpart and that the visit had been of immense professional value to them
- All visitors considered that they had been fully informed of their role and expected activities during the visit prior to travel
- All considered that the visit to Jamaica had involved a climbing a steep learning curve
- All felt privileged at being given the opportunity to see a parallel system at work
- Seven visitors recorded their belief that the visit had helped to sustain relationships beyond the life of the Project and so encourage the development of new ideas on ways to co-operate
- All considered that there were ways in which co-operation could still continue beyond the Project that would benefit both parties
- A general heightened awareness of cultural differences and, therefore, of the need for teaching and learning materials to reflect those differences

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- All but one visitor to the island was in regular contact with their Jamaican lead counterpart
- Two people expressed a view that their visit had been too crowded and would have welcomed some time to reflect
- One person expressed a wish that the visit could have been longer than two weeks due to the amount of new information that needed to be absorbed
- Material brought out to Jamaica needed to be re-designed to reflect the different culture and learning style. There was no time to do this jointly, but such an activity would be valuable for the future
- More than one visit to Jamaica would help sustain developments and enabled time to be found for the joint piloting of ideas
- The group would have welcomed opportunities to enable teacher exchanges to take place for periods longer than two weeks
- One person considered that their visit had acted as a mechanism for encouraging educational change to take place by creating professional dialogue 'across the water'



Personal, Social and Moral Education Activities

KEY OUTCOMES FROM THE VISITS

Those interviewed both in Jamaica and the UK perceive that they have contributed to educational change by developing key aspects of learning and adapting such learning to the needs of Jamaica. The initiatives underway at different levels - national, regional, schools and other learning institutions - are perceived to have been possible because of the real-life learning experience from the UK. The developments have been initiated thanks to the drive and commitment of all those involved in the link exchanges.

The outcomes and activities arising out of the link study exchange programme are summarised below. Table 3 provides information of joint developments undertaken with UK counterparts. Table 4 provides a list of other outcomes/ activities undertaken by participants of the UK study visits (Table 3). These activities are at various stages of progression and some are still in the discussion stage. However, all Jamaican participants perceive that, without the UK experience, they would not have developed the options chosen or moved forward at the speed they had.

“The UK visit gave us the opportunity to assess other practices. For me it was the motivator to get started on new initiatives.”

Esmine Anderson, Community Relations Officer, Region 4

LINK COUNTERPART	ACTIVITY/ OUTCOME
Birmingham LEA (Deputy CEO Life Long Learning)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of regional resource centre in Jamaica • Placement of Birmingham teachers into Jamaica schools • Exchange of pupils • Development of teacher training link
DfES (Numeracy Regional Director)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Numeracy policy development
Staffordshire LEA (Springfield School)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEN Autism programme • Pupil links through IT (both in planning stage)
University of Wales at Bangor (School of Education)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global links topic piloted in 3 Welsh primary schools, drawing historical links with Jamaica (sugar-slave-slate triangle) • Paper on student teachers' attitudes to Creole
Walsall LEA (Literacy Co-ordinator)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint creation of training materials (planned)

Table 3. Developments with the UK Counterparts

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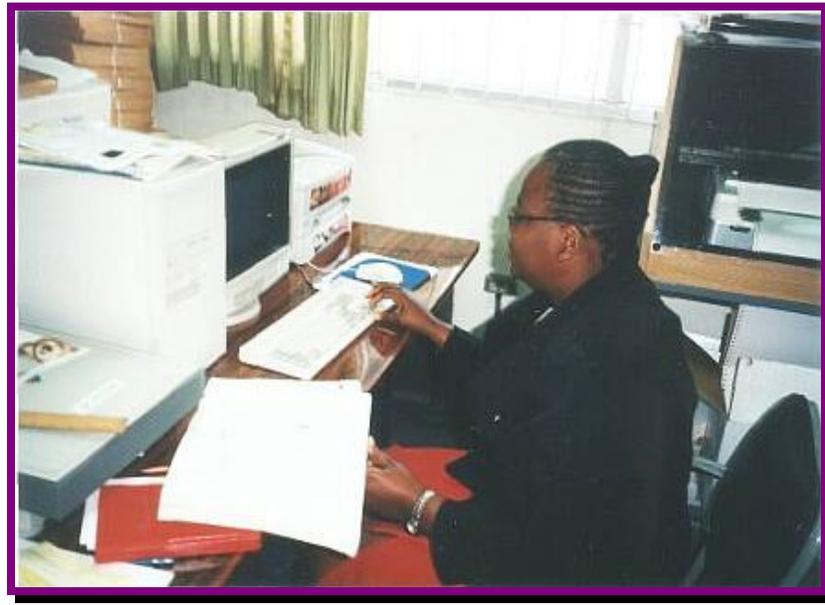
STUDY VISIT/ EXCHANGE GROUP	VISIT OUTCOMES/ ACTIVITIES
Guidance and Counselling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pastoral Care workshop • Principal Training • Pastoral Care Support manual • Discussion groups on 'Youth at Risk'
Maths/ Numeracy/ Computing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy formation and feasibility study • Numeracy Resource Centre development • Workshops • Piloting of numeracy strategies in schools
Special Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of Behaviour Management strategies for autistic students and students with dual sensory impairment • Development of teaching and learning strategies • Teacher/parent/community workshops
Community Relations Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More use of schools for evening classes in communities • Introduction of new strategies on approaches to parenting • Introduction of strategies on approaches to homework • Introduction of more parental events • Education-Business links
Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of Literacy Window • Resources identification • Workshops • Word Bank Development
Regional Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforcement of Target Setting • New approaches to Regional Planning • Innovative leadership strategies • Approaches to schools in challenging circumstances • Self-Review and Evaluation • Mainstreaming of School Improvement Planning

Table 4. Key Outcomes from UK Visits

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OVERALL IMPACT

- The two-way process facilitated the development of a range of change activities which may have otherwise never have taken place
- Both education systems would seem to have gained from the link experience;
- The learning curve on both sides was focused on the realisation that cultural differences do not readily allow for the transfer of practices from one country to another, but the opportunity to observe, amend and re-design processes to fit each situation has been a valuable learning experience for all involved
- Through the process of dissemination a range of stakeholders have become not only familiar with new and different ideas and processes but also part of those benefiting from joint experiences
- A wider audience than just JAASP schools has been involved in many of the developments
- At this stage it is reasonable to suggest that some of the link activities being developed will be sustained through the determination and commitment of the partners



June Hamilton (SEN Unit) working on new materials for the partially-sighted

LESSONS LEARNED

While the link study exchange programme was generally successful and has had many positive outcomes, there are a number of lessons to be learned from the experience:

- More time to prepare for the visit to the UK would have been welcomed
- Participants would have welcomed a longer link visit experience to enable a focus to be developed and pursued
- The opportunity to have visited the UK on more than one occasion during the life-time of JAASP would have assisted with development activities back in Jamaica
- A clearer and closer link between the time-line of the Project and the targets of the Ministry would have enhanced the effectiveness of outcomes;
- Development and dissemination activities may have been more effective if there had been better co-ordination between the Ministry, the regions, individual visiting groups and JAASP
- The change management process that some groups sought to effect may have benefited from more effective support from both the Ministry and JAASP, if intended outcomes from the links had been agreed beforehand and structures put in place to enable the change process to develop
- A key implementation issue focused on the management of the curriculum and the ways in which 'good practice' can become embedded in the system
- There is a need to ensure that implementation strategies introduced are not based on short-term gains and 'quick fixes', but focused on mechanisms which support the sustainability of 'change for the better' on a national scale.

APPENDIX: GOING TO JAMAICA

Such has been the perceived success of the Birmingham link that The Guardian newspaper (UK) produced an article outlining the benefits Birmingham considered it has gained by forging links with counterparts in the Jamaica Education system

Going to Jamaica

As schools in Birmingham reel from the shock of the Aston New Year murders, **Chris Arnot** looks at a scheme to take some children back to their roots.

Tuesday January 21, 2003

The Guardian

Imagine that you teach in a comprehensive in a grim part of the inner city and, one day, the head asks if you fancy a week in Jamaica. Port Antonio, Jamaica, to be precise - a town of around 100,000 souls on the north-east coast, separated from Kingston by the Blue mountains. The climate and local attractions are such that the swashbuckling actor Errol Flynn once owned a "pleasure" island nearby.

This would not be a holiday, you understand. You would have to take around half a dozen year-10 teenagers, one or two of whom might be paid-up members of the awkward squad. But, then again, you would not be alone. Two or three colleagues would be with you. Together, you would spend some time observing lessons and talking to staff and pupils at Titchfield High School, where teachers are treated with almost complete respect.

Time to wake up? Well, not if you happen to be a member of staff at Heartlands High in Birmingham. They have been chosen to pioneer a scheme whereby schools from this country's largest education authority involve themselves in twinning arrangements with schools in Jamaica, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. Pupils and teachers from Titchfield, for example, will be given an opportunity to visit Birmingham which, demographic research suggests, is set to become the first British city where ethnic minorities comprise the majority, by 2020.

"We want to embrace the enormous challenges posed by a multicultural, multi-faith, multi-language community, and make this a more harmonious place," says Birmingham's head of lifelong learning, Javed Khan. "There's a strong educational rationale behind these proposals. If you recognise the home culture of pupils with their origins in different parts of the globe, then it raises self-esteem and makes it more likely that they will apply themselves better at school."

Khan, cited by this newspaper last year as one of the 12 rising stars of UK local government, was born and brought up amid Birmingham's sizeable population from the Mirpur region of Pakistan. "I think in English and work in English," he says. "But I was regularly taken back to my parents' home village as a child, and I think that gave me a broader understanding of other communities."

So why has the Caribbean community been chosen to spearhead Birmingham's experiment with school twinning? "Because recent events have reminded us how important it is to improve educational attainments among boys with their roots in that

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part of the world," he says. By "recent events" he means the explosive skirmish in the turf war between black gangs, which left two young women dead in the early hours of New Year's Day. What have become known locally as the Aston shootings took place uncomfortably close to Heartlands High in neighbouring Nechells. "Many of our pupils come from Aston and are very aware of what's going on," says headteacher John McMullan. "Sometimes they get involved in disputes on the way to and from school but, thankfully, there's not much evidence that they continue inside.

"We're constantly trying to provide an alternative to street culture. By exposing our pupils to the respectful attitudes that still prevail in many Jamaican schools, we hope to reap some benefits. The perception of the island as a hotbed of drugs and guns doesn't match the wider reality."

He sees video-conferencing as the main way of linking the majority of his pupils with their counterparts in Port Antonio. At the same time, he doesn't envisage any shortage of volunteers for first-hand visits from pupils or staff. "There's some funding available for a trip this term, preferably at half-term," he says. "If I went into the staffroom and asked whether anybody fancied going, I think one or two hands might go up."

Five of the school's 35 staff are black and an equivalent number are Asian. Among the pupils, the ratio is roughly a third each: black, Asian and white. "At the moment our African-Caribbean pupils are doing better than our white kids," he concedes. "We're doing various things to challenge the white boys, including bricklaying courses at local colleges and links with factories like Jaguar and MG Rover." All the same, a trip across the city to Longbridge doesn't have quite the same allure as a flight across the Atlantic to Port Antonio. McMullan hasn't ruled out the possibility of future visits to Jamaica including white and Asian boys and, indeed, girls of all races.

But, locally as well as nationally, it is the performance of African-Caribbean boys at secondary level that continues to cause most concern. Exclusion rates are four times the national average and in Birmingham, only 25% achieved five GCSE grades between A and C last year, compared with the city-wide average of 45%. And while the total number of schoolchildren in Birmingham is expected to fall by 7% over the next 10 years, the number of those with origins in the Caribbean is projected to rise by 25%. Admittedly, those estimates were compiled before the government introduced visa restrictions on immigration from Jamaica. The announcement came on the same day that the education department unveiled its twinning plans. "It's not helpful," Khan admits. "But it won't scupper our scheme. After all, there have been visa restrictions already in place on those coming in from the subcontinent and we still plan to forge strong educational links with Pakistan, Bangladesh and India as well as Jamaica."

In the long term, he hopes to set up in each country what he calls a "Birmingham learning centre" as a focal point for twinning arrangements.

The Department for International Development and the British Council are likely to contribute towards the costs, he says. "And the host governments are contributing land. Jamaica has given us five acres in Kingston."

Khan has been working there with Elaine Allen, now principal of Shortwood Teacher Training College and, during the early 90s, the first female black headteacher at a secondary school in Birmingham. Her knowledge of the system in both countries is invaluable. One of the functions of the learning centres will be to provide a resource

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base for the development of teaching and learning materials which fuse the British and Jamaican/Caribbean curricula.

Khan believes that the curriculum in the UK is too narrowly focused on the culture of the white, indigenous population. "Two schools in Birmingham," he says, "have already switched to the International Baccalaureate. It's recognised by British universities but has a more global emphasis than the national curriculum."

Yet large parts of the Jamaican education system would appeal to leader writers on the Daily Telegraph. Forty years after independence, the 11-plus survives (as it does in Birmingham) and students at 16 take an exam more akin to O-levels than GCSEs. Khan insists that the curriculum is beginning to change to take account of Caribbean literature and the growing American influence on the island. But what drew him towards Titchfield High as a suitable twinning school are the sort of factors that were much more prevalent in British schools 40 years ago. "Respect for faith, family and teachers is much in evidence," he says. "And it's very regimental with an insistence on smart uniforms and strict discipline."

Enforced by corporal punishment? "I don't know about that," he says. "Anyway it's not about bringing back the cane; it's about what we can learn to improve education for black boys in Birmingham. They tend to start well in the school system, but in too many cases something happens between primary and secondary school. We're trying to tease out what it is."

There are no shortage of long-established theories, from the lack of male role models to teachers stereotyping black children as potential troublemakers who are likely to excel only on the sportsfield. Sir David Winkley, an Oxford don who became headteacher of an inner-city primary, has a longer perspective than most. His book, *Handsworth Revolution*, tells how he took over the Grove school in that Birmingham suburb in the 1970s and transformed it into one of the most lavishly praised educational institutions in the country.

"When I started," he recalls, "parents from the black community were tremendously conscious of the clash between the excessively liberal culture here and the discipline they'd experienced at schools in the West Indies. They wanted uniforms and they wanted their children to sit and listen. Once you had their confidence, they were very supportive. There was a very subtle balance to be achieved between showing a lot of warmth to their kids while not taking any prisoners."

It seems ironic, to put it mildly, that the biggest LEA in Britain is now seeking solutions in the very island from which the vast majority of that generation emigrated in search of a better life for themselves, their children and grandchildren.

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City of Wolverhampton College

Community Education development centre, Coventry

Community Safety Headquarters, Birmingham

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Dudley Counselling Services

Dudley Education Authority

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Great Barr Secondary School, Birmingham

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National Youth Agency, Leicester

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Park Hall Junior School, Walsall

Paul Hayes School, Willenhall

Priory School, Dudley

Ridgeway Primary School

Rookery Junior School, Birmingham

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Sandwell Local Education Authority

School of Education, University of Wales, Bangor

Semestow School, Wolverhampton

Shenley Court School, Birmingham

Springfield Special School, Staffordshire

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Sunfield Children's Home, Clent
Study for Adolescence, Brighton
Victoria School, Birmingham
Visiting Teacher Service, Birmingham
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Walsall Local Education Authority
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March 2003

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